

**Disability Awareness Month**

**ADA MEDIA WATCH PROGRAM**

*Designed and developed by the Indiana State ADA Steering Committee*

*Funded by the Great Lakes Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center*

*Developers: Liz Lightfoot and Vicki Pappas*

**Purpose**

Many community members in Indiana have not been exposed to positive images of people with disabilities and thus might be skeptical about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The media, both print and broadcast, play an important role in telling “stories” of people with disabilities that correctly inform and shape attitudes. Appropriate portrayals of people with disabilities and disability issues in the media are a vital foundation for full implementation of the ADA.

Thus, to further promote the implementation of the ADA in Indiana, the ADA Media Watch Program has been developed. Its purpose is to monitor how people with disabilities and disability issues are portrayed in the Indiana media. The ADA Media Watch Program promotes the use of “People First Language” and information that portrays people with disabilities as productive, independent and active citizens of their communities.

The Media Watch Program was developed and first implemented by the Indiana State Americans with Disabilities Act Steering Committee during 1995-1997. Graduates of Indiana’s Partners in Policymaking Program and other individuals with the disabilities field tested the program, monitoring local and national media sources. They responded to both positive and negative portrayals of people with disabilities by sending the Media Watch Packet and a personal letter to reporters covering disability issues. Many users have encouraged this program to be used throughout Indiana. Your participation can help achieve that goal!

### **What's Included in the ADA Media Watch Packet**

- Media Packet to send to Media Representatives, including:
  - Sample Personal Letter
  - Brochure: “Language is a Powerful Tool!” (developed by National Center on Accessibility in Martinsville, Ind.)
  - List of Indiana ADA Resources
  - Mailing Envelope
- Other Sample Texts for Letters and Tips for Writing a Successful Letter
- Response Form

### **How to Participate**

1. Read your local/regional newspapers daily and be on the lookout for television or radio programs that feature a person with a disability or a disability-related issue. It might help to have a notepad near your television or radio so you will be ready to jot down the facts of a media presentation.
2. After encountering a portrayal of an individual with a disability (positive or negative), respond to the media source as soon as possible.
  - a. Simply use the sample letter, sign it and enclose it in the special envelope provided in the kit. Also enclose a copy of “Language is a Powerful Tool” and the ADA Resources list in the special envelope. Mail the packet to the media representative. You might want to add a postscript of your own on the sample letter.
  - b. Or, if you have time, write your own letter using your personal stationery or letterhead. See suggestions below for “Sample Paragraphs” and “Tips for Writing a Successful Letter.” Typed letters are preferable, but handwritten letters are also fine. Enclose your letter, plus “Language is a Powerful Tool” and the ADA Resources list in the special envelope and mail the entire package to your media representative.
3. ***Praise*** journalists who appropriately portray people with disabilities/disability issues, and ***educate*** journalists who use inappropriate portrayals of people with disabilities/disability issues.

4. After sending three Media Watch Packets, send the Response Form back to the ADA Steering Committee using the enclosed addressed, return postage envelope (c/o Rita Emerick, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, 2853 E. 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47408).
5. If you need help composing your letter or need more Media Watch Packets, please call Rita Emerick, staff person for the ADA Steering Committee, or the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community: (812) 855-6508.

### **Tips for Writing a Successful Letter**

1. **Be Timely.** Write your letter as soon as possible after the article is published or the story is aired.
2. **Keep It Simple.** One page should be plenty to convey your message while still keeping the attention of the reader. Edit your letters to make them easier to read.
3. **Use Facts.** Relay the details of the media presentation or news article accurately (date, page number, name of news program, journalist, etc).
4. **Be Polite.** You will be more likely to get your point across if you assume a journalist is uninformed about disability issues but willing to learn about more appropriate portrayals.
5. **Be Helpful.** Offer yourself, any disability organizations listed on the ADA Resources enclosure or any organization to which you belong as a resource on disability issues for the journalist.
6. **Be Personal.** Identify yourself as a reader/viewer/listener. Mentioning that you are writing in association with the Indiana State ADA Steering Committee is helpful, but personal letters from media customers are very effective.
7. **Follow-through.** If you receive a response to your letter that you disagree with, or if the media organization continues portraying people with disabilities in an inappropriate manner, revise your letter and resend it.

### **Sample Paragraphs for Letters**

If you wish to write your own letter rather than using the enclosed prepared letter, the following *sample texts* might give you some “starting points.” There are sample beginnings, middle paragraphs and/or endings to guide you when writing your own letters.

## **SAMPLE BEGINNINGS OR INTRODUCTIONS**

- I would like to take this opportunity to call to your attention an article in your paper that inappropriately portrayed a person with a disability as being a hero simply for living with a disability. (John Doe's) accomplishments should be valued for themselves, not because (John Doe) accomplished them while having a disability.
- On (date), newscaster (Mary Johnson) led a story on Medicaid by saying "the crippled are confined to more than wheelchairs (or other inappropriate language)." While I appreciate your attention to the problems of Medicaid for people with disabilities, I would like to point out to you the inappropriate usage of language describing people with disabilities by (Ms. Johnson.)
- I am writing in response to an article entitled "Disabled Boy Makes Good" that appeared in the (local paper) on (month, date, year) on page (xx).
- I was very pleased to see your story on (Jane Smith) on the (date) edition of (program). While (Jane Smith) has visual impairments, your story focused on her talent as a violinist and her recital at the Opera House rather than on her disability.
- I am writing to thank (reporter) for his article on how the Americans with Disabilities Act has positively affected the lives of people with disabilities.

## **SAMPLE MIDDLE PARAGRAPHS**

### Regarding: Disability as a Human Interest Story

While I realize that the life of a person with a disability seems like a good human interest story, people with disabilities do not appreciate these pieces. What the public learns from these stories is that if people with disabilities are simply "heroic," we (they) can overcome any physical problem. However, the real problems people with disabilities face are not their own physical barriers, but rather are problems caused by societal barriers, such as a lack of curb cuts or interpreters and blatant job discrimination. The real human interest story is the story of the long fight for disability rights by the disability community.

### Regarding: Person with Disability as Average Citizen

Approximately 54 million Americans have some kind of physical, sensory, cognitive or mental disability. People with disabilities are average American citizens, and portraying them (us) as anything other than that results in marginalizing a large class of people. Thus, when covering

an accomplishment (positive or negative) of a person who has a disability, please do not focus on the person's disability. Only mention a person's disability if the story is based on that disability.

Regarding: Language

In your article on (Professor Johnson's) new book on (astrophysics), you describe him as "suffering from \_\_\_\_" and "confined to a wheelchair." These terms have negative connotations that do not accurately describe the life of (Professor Johnson) nor of people with disabilities in general.

Instead of "suffering from \_\_," (Professor Johnson) is simply a person who has \_\_\_\_\_. Similarly, (Professor Johnson) is not "confined to a wheelchair," but rather he uses a wheelchair to get around. The terms that were used in your article evoke pity for (Professor Johnson) rather than respect.

The words and phrases used to describe people with disabilities help shape people's perceptions. A person with a disability should always be referred to as a *person* first and not by his or her disability. Also, grouping individuals together as "the mentally retarded" or "the handicapped" puts the focus on the disability, rather than on the individual. The enclosed brochure and bookmarks describe in more detail the use of appropriate language for people with disabilities.

Regarding: The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law on July 26, 1990, plays a vital role in creating a culture of independence among people with disabilities in the workplace. There have been surprisingly few lawsuits filed nationwide regarding the ADA. As of 1995, only about 650 suits had been filed with the Department of Justice (Department of Justice, 7/95).

The Americans with Disabilities Act is not an unfunded mandate. Rather, the ADA is a civil rights law similar to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

**SAMPLE LETTER ENDINGS**

Thank you in advance for sharing this information with others on your staff. If you would like any additional information, please do not hesitate to call me.

Again, I would like to thank you for your positive portrayal of people with disabilities in your (newspaper/news program/etc.).

### Media Addresses/Contacts

#### Local TV - Southern IN

WTIU - Channel 30  
Indiana University  
Radio-TV Center  
Bloomington, IN 47405

WEVV-TV Channel 44  
44 Main St.  
Evansville, IN 47708

WFIE-TV Channel 14  
1115 Mt. Auburn Rd.  
Evansville, IN 47720

WTVW-TV Channel 7  
477 Carpenter St.  
P.O. Box 7  
Evansville, IN 47701

WISH-TV Channel 8  
1950 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202

WRTV-TV Channel 6  
1330 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202

WTHR-TV Channel 13  
1000 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

WTTV - Channel 4  
3490 Bluff Rd.  
Indianapolis, IN 46217

WXIN-TV Channel 59  
1440 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202

WBAK-TV Channel 38  
138 Poplar St.  
Terre Haute, IN 47808

WTHI-TV Channel 10  
918 Ohio St.  
Terre Haute, IN 47807

WTWO-TV Channel 2  
10849 U.S. Hwy. 41 S.  
Terre Haute, IN 47808

WVUT-TV Channel 22  
1200 N. 2nd St.  
Vincennes, IN 47591

WAVE-TV Channel 3  
725 S. Floyd St.  
Louisville, KY 40203

WDRB-TV Channel 41  
One Independence Square  
Louisville, KY 40203

WLKY-TV Channel 32  
1918 Mellwood Ave.  
Louisville, KY 40206

Local TV – Northern IN  
WANE-TV Channel 15  
P.O. Box 1515  
Fort Wayne, IN 46801

WPTA Channel 21  
P.O. Box 2121  
Fort Wayne, IN 46801

WKJG Channel 33  
2633 W. State Blvd.  
Fort Wayne, IN 46808

Network Television  
ABC News  
47 W. 66th St.  
New York, NY 10023

ABC Good Morning America  
147 Columbus Ave.  
New York, NY 10023

CBS News  
524 W. 57th St.  
New York, NY 10019

CNN  
P.O. Box 105366  
Atlanta, GA 30348-5366

NBC  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10112

PBS  
1320 Braddock Place  
Alexandria, VA 22314

The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer  
3620 S. 27<sup>th</sup> St.  
Arlington, VA 22206

National Public Radio  
635 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20001

National Newspapers  
New York Times  
229 W. 43rd St.  
New York, NY 10036

USA Today  
1000 Wilson Blvd.  
Arlington, VA 22209

Wall Street Journal  
200 Liberty St.  
New York, NY 10281

Associated Press  
50 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10020

Radio: Check local phone book.

Local Newspapers: Find address  
on the first or second pages.

Dear Media Representative:

I would like to provide you with some resource materials to use when writing about people with disabilities.

One of the hallmarks of disability awareness is that people with disabilities be portrayed as individuals who are independent, productive and active community members. Thus, in writing and speaking about people with disabilities, the preferred usage is “People First Language.”

The basic premise behind “People First Language” is that people with disabilities are indeed people first. Thus, when one is speaking or writing about a person with a disability, it is more respectful and appropriate to focus on the person first rather than his or her disability. For example, rather than saying “the disabled,” say “person with a disability,” and rather than saying “afflicted with blindness,” say “a person who is blind.”

To further assist you in promoting “People First Language” among your staff and your readers, we are pleased to share a very helpful resource with you, a brochure from the National Center on Accessibility written especially for the media.

Please share this information with your staff. If you have any further questions about “People First Language” or the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact me or anyone listed on the enclosed “ADA Resources” list.

Sincerely,

# ADA Resources for Indiana

## **Great Lakes Disability & Business Technical Assistance Center**

University of Illinois at Chicago  
1640 Roosevelt Road (M/C 626)  
Chicago, Illinois 60608  
800-949-4232 (voice/TT)  
312-413-1407 (voice/TT)  
312-413-1856 (fax)  
[www.greatlakes.org](http://www.greatlakes.org)

## **Indiana State ADA Steering Committee**

c/o Indiana Institute on Disability and Community  
2853 E. 10th Street  
Bloomington, IN 47408-2601  
812-855-6508 (voice)  
812-855-9396 (TT)  
812-855-9630 (fax)  
[www.isdd.indiana.edu](http://www.isdd.indiana.edu)

## **Indiana Governor's Planning Council for People with Disabilities**

150 W. Market Street, Suite 628  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
317-232-7770 (voice)  
317-232-7771 (TT)  
317-233-3712 (fax)  
[GPCPD@gpcpd.org](mailto:GPCPD@gpcpd.org) (e-mail)

## **Breaking New Ground Resource Center**

Purdue University  
225 S. University Street  
W. Lafayette, IN 47907-2064  
765-494-5088 (voice)  
765-496-1356 (fax)  
[BNG@ecn.Purdue.edu](mailto:BNG@ecn.Purdue.edu) (e-mail)  
[www.ecn.purdue.edu/ABE/Extension/BNG/Index](http://www.ecn.purdue.edu/ABE/Extension/BNG/Index)

## **Indiana State Government Department of Personnel**

Indiana Government Center South  
402 W. Washington Street, Room W161  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
317-233-3320 (voice)  
317-232-4555 (TT)  
317-232-3089 (fax)  
[lhaskett@gwnet.isd.state.in.us](mailto:lhaskett@gwnet.isd.state.in.us)

## **Family and Social Services Administration – Human Resources**

402 W. Washington Street, Room E431  
Indianapolis, IN 46207  
317-233-6988 (voice)  
317-232-1530 (fax)  
[ric\\_edwards@mailexcite.com](mailto:ric_edwards@mailexcite.com) (e-mail)  
[www.state.in.us/fssa/](http://www.state.in.us/fssa/)

## **ATTAIN, Inc.**

2346 S. Lynhurst, Suite 507  
Indianapolis, IN 46241  
800-528-8246 (voice)  
812-486-8808 (voice)  
317-486-8809 (fax)  
[CFULFORD@INDIAN.vinu.edu](mailto:CFULFORD@INDIAN.vinu.edu) (e-mail)

## **Indiana Civil Rights Commission**

Indiana Government Center North  
100 N. Senate Ave., Room N103  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
317-232-2600 (voice)  
800-628-2909 (voice)  
800-743-3333 (TT)  
317-232-6580 (fax)  
317-233-4809 (fax)  
[sleek@crc.state.in.us](mailto:sleek@crc.state.in.us) (e-mail)  
[www.state.in.us/icrc](http://www.state.in.us/icrc)



**Indiana Protection & Advocacy Services**

4701 N. Keystone, Suite 222  
Indianapolis, IN 46205  
317-722-5555 (voice/TT)  
800-622-4845 (voice)  
317-722-5564 (fax)

**Department of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Family and Social Services Administration**

402 W. Washington Street, Room W453  
P.O. Box 7083  
Indianapolis, IN 46207-7083  
317-232-1319 (voice)  
317-232-1427 (TT)  
800-545-7763 ext. 1319 (voice)  
[www.state.in.us/fssa/](http://www.state.in.us/fssa/)

**Regional Resources****EmployAbilities**

2000 Greenbush  
Lafayette, IN 47904  
765-420-1414 (voice)  
888-423-5531 (voice)  
765-420-1415 (TT)  
765-447-6456 (fax)  
[jobfndr@cnfe.com](mailto:jobfndr@cnfe.com) (e-mail)

**The Rehabilitation Center**

3701 Bellemeade Ave.  
Evansville, IN 47714  
812-479-1411 (voice)  
812-437-2636 (fax)

**Northwest Indiana ADA Project  
Tradewinds Rehabilitation Center**

5901 W. 7th Ave., Box 6308  
Gary, IN 46406  
219-949-4000 ext. 281 or ext. 278 (voice)  
219-944-8134 (fax)  
[TWRC@netnitco.net](mailto:TWRC@netnitco.net) (e-mail)

**National Center on Accessibility**

Indiana University  
2805 E. 10<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 190  
Bloomington, IN 47408  
812-856-4422 (voice)  
812-856-4421 (TT)  
812-856-4480 (fax)  
[www.indiana.edu/~nca](http://www.indiana.edu/~nca)

**Indiana Centers for Independent Living****ATTIC Center for Independent Living**

1721 Washington Avenue  
Vincennes, IN 47591  
812-886-0575 (voice)  
800-962-8842 (voice)  
812-886-0575 (TT)  
812-886-1128 (fax)  
[INATTIC1@aol.com](mailto:INATTIC1@aol.com) (e-mail)  
[www.theattic.org](http://www.theattic.org)

**Everybody Counts, Inc.**

9111 Broadway, Ste. A  
Merrillville, IN 46410  
219-769-5055 (voice)  
888-769-3636 (voice)  
219-756-3323 (TT)  
219-769-5325 (fax)  
[ecounts@netnitco.net](mailto:ecounts@netnitco.net) (e-mail)  
[www.thetimesonline.com/org/everybody\\_ecounts@netnitco.net](http://www.thetimesonline.com/org/everybody_ecounts@netnitco.net)

**Allen County League for the Blind and Disabled, Inc.**

5821 S Anthony Blvd  
Fort Wayne, IN 46816  
260-441-0551 (voice/TT)  
800-889-3443 (voice/TT)  
260-441-7760 (fax)  
[www.theleague.org](http://www.theleague.org)

**Indianapolis Resource Center for Independent Living (IRCIL)**

2210 N. Capitol  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
317-596-6440 (voice/TT)  
800-860-7181 (voice/TT)  
317-596-6446 (fax)  
[ircil@netdirect.net](mailto:ircil@netdirect.net) (e-mail)

**Other Indiana Independent Living Centers**

**Southern Indiana Center for Independent Living (SICIL)**

Stone City Mall  
3300 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
Bedford, IN 47421  
812-277-9626 (voice)  
812-277-9627 (TT)  
800-845-6914 (V/TT)  
812-277-9628 (fax)  
[sicil@tima.com](mailto:sicil@tima.com) (e-mail)

**Northern Indiana Independent Living Services (NIILS)**

702 Williams Street  
Elkhart, IN 46516  
219-293-7509 (voice)  
219-293-8783 (fax)

**Wabash Independent Living and Learning Center (WILL)**

7J Meadows Center  
Terre Haute, IN 47803-2373  
812-232-9455 (voice)  
877-915-9455 (voice)  
812-234-1536 (fax)  
[teresa@thewillcenter.org](mailto:teresa@thewillcenter.org)  
[www.thewillcenter.org](http://www.thewillcenter.org)

**Independent Living Center of Eastern Indiana**

3771 South A  
Richmond, IN 47374  
(765) 939-9226 (voice)  
(877) 939-9226 (voice)  
[ilcein@ruralpek.com](mailto:ilcein@ruralpek.com)

## ADA Media Watch Program Response Form

After you have distributed your Media Watch Packets, please return this Response Form to Jamy Schuler, c/o Borshoff Johnson Matthews, 500 Majestic Building, 47 S. Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, IN 46204-3657). At the bottom of this form, also indicate if you wish to receive additional packets.

	Name/Address of Media Organization	Brief Description of Program/Article	Date of Program/Article	Date Media Watch Packet Sent
Example	Bloomington Enquirer 1234 Walnut Street Bloomington, IN 47401	Newspaper article discussing group homes – frequently used the term “mentally handicapped” and other inappropriate language	3/15/00	3/20/00
Contact #1				
Contact #2				
Contact #3				

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ additional packets. I would like to continue participating in the ADA Media Watch Program.